

Message Text

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21

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SUBJECT: MFA DIRECTOR-GENERAL AVINERI ON THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

1. SHLOMO AVINERI, IN HIS FIRST MAJOR SPEECH SINCE TAKING OVER AS MFA DIRECTOR GENERAL ON APRIL 12, HAS EMPHASIZED THAT THE CENTRAL PROBLEM IN THE ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE IS THE REFUSAL OF THE ARABS TO ACCEPT THE LIGITIMACY OF ISRAEL. FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF THE OFFICIAL GOI PRESS BULLETIN PARAPHRASING EXCERPTS FROM HIS APRIL 28 PRESENTATION TO A GROUP OF STUDENTS AT TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY.

2. BEGIN TEXT: WE MUST ONCE AGAIN DRAW THE ATTENTION OF THE WORLD TO THE FACT THAT THE FOCAL POINT OF THE ISRAEL-ARAB CONFLICT IS NOT THE ADMINISTERED TERRITORIES NOR THE PALESTINIANS, BUT THE UNWILLINGNESS OF THE ARAB TO ACCEPT THE LEGITIMACY OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL.

3. PROFESSOR AVINERI POINTED OUT THAT,SINCE THE SIX DAY WAR, ARAB PROPAGANDA HAS SUCCEDED IN FOCUSING ATTENTION ON THE PROBLEM OF THE ADMINISTERED TERRITORIES. SIMULTANEOUSLY,
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THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PALESTINIAN ORGANIZATIONS HAVE BEEN

STEPPED UP, REACHING HEIGHTS THEY HAD NOT ACHIEVED BEFORE 1967. THE COMBINATION OF THESE PHENOMENA, AS WELL AS THE DISPUTE BETWEEN "HAWKS" AND "DOVES" IN ISRAEL, HAS PLAYED A PART IN SHIFTING THE CONTROVERSY IN THE ISRAEL-ARAB CONFLICT, TO THE PROBLEM OF THE TERRITORIES, THE ARABS CLAIMING THAT THE ADMINISTRATION BY ISRAEL OF THESE TERRITORIES IS PREVENTING PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. ISRAEL, SOMETIMES WITHOUT BEING AWARE OF IT, HAS BEEN DRAGGED INTO THIS DISPUTE--WHICH IS A VERY CONVENIENT FIELD OF PROPAGANDA FOR THE ARABS.

4. ACCORDING TO PROFESSOR AVINERI, IT IS NOW TIME TO PUT THE DISPUTE IN ITS PROPER PLACE. THE CONFLICT HAS COME AS A RESULT OF A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN TWO NATIONAL MOVEMENTS IN THE REGION--THE JEWISH AND THE ARAB--WITH ZIONISM ALWAYS READY FOR COMPROMISE (IN 1947, FOR EXAMPLE), WHILE ARAB NATIONALISM WAS NEVER PREPARED TO RECOGNIZE THE EXISTENCE OF ANOTHER NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN THE REGION. WITH ALL THE IMPORTANCE ATTACHED TO A SETTLEMENT FOR THE FUTURE OF THE ADMINISTERED TERRITORIES AND A FUTURE FOR THE PALESTINIANS, THE REAL REASON FOR THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT IS THE UNWILLINGNESS OF THE ARABS TO RECOGNIZE THE RIGHT OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE TO A STATE OF ITS OWN. ISRAEL'S INFORMATION MUST EMPHASIZE THAT THIS IS THE FOCAL POINT OF THE CONFLICT, AND THAT THE ARAB REFUSAL IS THE CAUSE OF A CONSTANT THREAT OF WAR TO THE MIDDLE EAST. THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS SAID HE WOULD MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ENSURE THAT ISRAEL'S INFORMATION ABROAD PLACES THE EMPHASIS ON THE REAL FOCUS OF THE DISPUTE, THEREBY GIVING MOMENTUM TO AN INFORMATION CAMPAIGN THAT DOES NOT CONSIST ONLY OF REACTIONS BUT OF ACTUAL DEEDS. END TEXT

5. COMMENT: AVINERI'S THEME--THAT THE MAIN PROBLEM IS THE ARAB REFUSAL TO ACCEPT THE LEGITIMACY OF ISRAEL--IS THE KEYSTONE OF ISRAELI THINKING ON THE ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE, AND HAS BEEN ARTICULATED REPEATEDLY BY RABIN AND OTHER ISRAELI LEADERS. IT ILLUSTRATES THE DEEP DISTRUST REGARDING LONG-TERM ARAB INTENTIONS WHICH CONTINUES TO CONSTITUTE A MAJOR PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIER TO NEGOTIATING EFFORTS. RECENT STATEMENTS BY SADAT IN THE WESTERN MEDIA AND TO OFFICIAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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U.S. AND OTHER VISITORS INDICATING "ACCEPTANCE" OF ISRAEL HAVE DONE LITTLE TO DISPEL THIS DISTRUST AND INDEED ARE GENERALLY DISCOUNTED. ISRAELIS EMPHASIZE THAT THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ON THE ONE HAND ACCEPTING THE "FACT" OF ISRAEL, GIVEN THE U.S. COMMITMENT AND ISRAELI MILITARY POWER, AND ON THE OTHER HAND RECOGNIZING IN A FORMAL AND DIRECT MANNER (E.G., IN A PEACE TREATY) THE LEGITIMACY OF ITS EXISTENCE.

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